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Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request 23

Date of Meeting: October 12, 2004

Date Submitted: October 6, 2004

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Parvez Alam, County Administrator
Vincent Long, Assistant County Administrator
Wayne Tedder, Planning Department Director

Subject: Approval of Grant Contracts with the Florida Communities Trust for Acquisition of Patty Sink, Copeland Sink and Upper Lake Lafayette

Statement of Issue:

This item requests Board approval of the Grant Contracts with the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) for the acquisition of Patty Sink, Copeland Sink and Upper Lake Lafayette (Attachments #1, #2, and #3). The Contracts define the procedures, requirements and responsibilities of Leon County and FCT to jointly acquire these properties. A map of the proposed acquisitions is provided in Attachment #4. The FCT has approved the funding for the acquisition of Patty Sink, Copeland Sink, and Upper Lake Lafayette (the Fallschase floodplain).

Background:

At the April 14, 2004 meeting, the Board authorized staff to submit applications to the Florida Communities Trust to acquire major sinkhole properties that had been identified as priorities by Blueprint 2000's "Sensitive Lands Working Group." The list of priority projects included Patty Sink and Copeland Sink. The acquisition of Upper Lake Lafayette was authorized by the Board in a previous FCT cycle and staff was directed to re-submit this application.

The FCT Governing Board approved funding for the Patty Sink, Copeland Sink and Upper Lake Lafayette projects at its meeting on September 2, 2004. Execution of the Grant Contract for each project is required prior to initiating negotiations with the property owners and the various steps necessary for Project Plan approval and release of funds.

Fiscal Impacts:

Acquisition of real property interest in the Patty Sink (119 acres) and Copeland Sink (168 acres) parcels will have no direct fiscal impact on the County, as 100% of the funds will be provided via Blueprint 2000 and FCT. Should an owner prefer to sell a conservation easement in lieu of fee-simple acquisition, funds will be provided by Blueprint 2000 and the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD) under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement between those agencies. In this latter case, costs for site management remain the responsibility of the property owner, with monitoring provided by the NFWFMD.

Title to any tracts acquired with the support of FCT will ultimately vest in the County and long-term management costs are a consideration. The Major Sinks sites are presumed to be environmentally sensitive and no capital-intensive park improvements or facilities are being proposed. Site improvements would be limited to fencing and to unpaved parking and trails where public access is deemed appropriate. Maintenance of such improvements is estimated to cost less than \$50 per acre/per year. Other long-term costs may include habitat restoration in the vicinity of the sinks to enhance and preserve groundwater quality. These costs may be roughly \$30 per acre/per year for several years until natural habitat is re-established. A detailed management plan will include input from the County's

Parks and Recreation and advice from agencies concerned with springs protection, such as the NFWFMD. If acquired, the management of Copeland Sink would most likely be linked to that of the nearby Booth tract.

The Upper Lake Lafayette project (218 acres) is not funded by Blueprint 2000. The estimated share of acquisition costs is \$831,000. This amount is based upon a 50-50 split of costs indicated by two previous appraisals conducted in accordance with state standards and reviewed for both procedure and conclusions. There have been preliminary discussions for joint City/County participation in the match for this project. Depending upon availability of funds, FCT may be in a position to increase its match should new appraisals confirm a higher value for the land. Improvements, including trails, would be more costly than for the Sinks projects as Upper Lake Lafayette is part of the larger Lake Lafayette Greenway for which more intensive trail development and pedestrian amenities are proposed.

Options:

1. Approve Grant Contracts with the Florida Communities Trust for the acquisition of Patty Sink, Copeland Sink and Upper Lake Lafayette and authorize the Chairman to execute.
2. Direct Blueprint 2000 to proceed with the acquisition of Patty Sink and Copeland Sink with reimbursement from the Florida Communities Trust.
3. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Options #1 and #2.

Attachments:

1. Grant Contract for Patty Sink
2. Grant Contract for Copeland Sink
3. Grant Contract for Upper Lake Lafayette
4. Map of proposed acquisitions

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